

## **Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs Basic Center Program Standards**

Member agencies of the Vermont Coalition of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs (VCRHYP) who receive contractual funds to provide runaway and homeless youth services through the Basic Center Program (BCP) federal grant agree to the following program standards.

### **The goal of these standards is to promote:**

- Enhanced youth outcomes through best practice service provision
- Support for program development and implementation
- Program alignment with state and federal guidelines
- Program protection from liability issues

### **BASIC CENTER PROGRAM SERVICE PRINCIPLES:**

- (a) Youth need opportunities, supports, and guidance to develop a healthy sense of self and successful life.
- (b) Effective services that result in long-term benefits are developmentally appropriate, helping youth address psychological, social, economic, and educational issues.
- (c) Each youth progresses differently depending on the severity of challenges faced, social determinants of health and adverse childhood experiences of trauma.
- (d) Youth can be their own best resources.
- (e) Services must help youth discover and/or develop their own strengths and competencies; strength-based work is integrated into every aspect of case management.

## **BASIC CENTER PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY:**

BCP sites provide short-term emergency shelter, home-based prevention services, and aftercare services to youth between 12-17 years old and who are runaway, homeless or precariously housed under any federal definition.

These definitions include youth who are:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (sometimes referred to as doubled-up or couch surfing)
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to lack of alternative adequate accommodations
- Abandoned in hospitals
- Living in a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; examples include: living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings
- Migratory children who qualify as homeless because they are living in circumstances described above
- In shelter, transitional housing settings or residential programs for youth or adults experiencing homelessness
- Exiting an institution where they temporarily resided for up to 90 days and were homeless immediately prior to entering the institution
- Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a family member<sup>1</sup>

Federal funding through the Family & Youth Services Bureau's Basic Center Program limits use of funding to youth entering services between the ages of 12-17; the maximum period of stay permitted in emergency shelter is 21 nights.

Youth in BCP programs must not be eligible for residential support from a state or federal program, such as the child protective system, or the juvenile justice system. Many people are involved with one or more "system" but are not eligible for residential assistance from that source. Those youths would still be eligible for BCP services if it is not possible for them to live in a safe environment with a relative or other safe alternative living arrangement.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition is a compilation from USICH's Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness, HUD HEARTH Act definition of homelessness and the U.S. Department of Education's Non-Regulatory Guidance on Title VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

## STANDARDS AND MEASURES

### A. PERSONNEL

**STANDARD:** *The program shall be adequately staffed by qualified personnel to ensure quality service delivery, effective program management, and the safety and supervision of youth in their care.*

#### **MEASURES:**

#### **1) The agency will hire and maintain qualified staff to manage and implement BCP services:**

- i) The program sustains a reasonable staff-to-youth ratio.
- ii) All personnel have a written job description that, at a minimum, addresses the major tasks to be performed and the qualifications required for the position.
- iii) The agency selects, for its service personnel, employees and/or volunteers with appropriate knowledge, related experience, or potential for working with youth and families in crisis.
- iv) The agency ensures background checks are conducted on all employees, volunteers, contractors, and consultants who have regular and unsupervised private contact with youth served by the organization, including:
  - a) State or tribal criminal history records, including fingerprint checks
  - b) Sex offender registry check
  - c) FBI criminal history records, including fingerprint checks
  - d) Child abuse and neglect registry check
  - e) Any other checks required by state law
- v) Agency personnel with responsibilities for supervision of the casework, counseling, and/or case management components have an advanced, post-high school (bachelor's) degree in a human service-related field and/or experience in working with youth and families or demonstrated ability and experience that qualifies them to assume such responsibility.
- vi) Personnel with supervisory responsibilities for overall program operations shall have, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree in a human service-related field or demonstrated ability and experience that qualifies them to assume such responsibility.
- vii) The program provides training to all paid and volunteer staff (including youth) in both the policies and procedures employed by the program and in specific skill areas as determined by the program to effectively serve BCP youth.
- viii) The program operates under an affirmative action/civil rights compliance plan.
- ix) Whenever possible, youth are included as participants in the interview process.

#### **2) Adequate supervision, ongoing training and development for all personnel and volunteers:**

- i) The agency has written procedures regarding employee supervision and evaluations.
- ii) The agency has written safety protocols for workers.

- iii) Case supervisors review current cases and individual service plans on a monthly basis (with relevant project staff through case or team meetings) to ensure quality/ coordinated services.
- iv) All paid and volunteer service personnel (including shelter and host home staff) participate in ongoing internal and/or external training, supervision, and development to further enhance their knowledge and ability to work with youth, including youth victims of human trafficking and other types of victimization. Trainings will include the core competencies of youth care workers:
  - a) Professionalism, including but not limited to, and consistent reliable job performance, awareness and used of professional ethics to guide practice
  - b) Applied positive youth development approach
  - c) Cultural and human diversity, including, but not limited to, gaining skills and knowledge to meet the needs of clients of a different, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion/ spirituality, gender identity/ expression, and/or sexual orientation
  - d) Applied human development, including, but not limited to understanding the needs of those at risk and with special needs
  - e) Relationship and communication, including, but not limited to, working with clients in a collaborative manner and
  - f) Developmental practice methods, including, but not limited to, utilizing methods focused on genuine relationships, health and safety, and intervention planning.
- v) BCP staff attend statewide bi-annual grant meetings to review project performance, identify trends, discuss challenges, share information, and receive training.
- vi) New BCP staff hired in member agencies are connected with VCRHYP for orientation training.

## **B. PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION**

**STANDARD:** *The agency shall administer the program in compliance with VCRHYP, State and Federal standards, including the RHY Act and RHY Final Rule.*

### **MEASURES:**

#### **1) Maintenance of a local board:**

- i) The agency shall have a local board of directors and/or a local advisory body that is representative of the communities it serves.
- ii) The agency provides training to the Board of Directors and/or Advisory Body designed to orient the members to the BCP program goals and objectives, as well as to the liabilities and responsibilities of the directors.
- iii) The Board of Directors and/or Advisory Body meet on a regular basis (at least quarterly) throughout the year to review program activities and progress.
- iv) The Board of Directors or Advisory Body annually reviews and/or approves the overall goals, objectives, contract compliance, and budget activities of the program.

- 2) Demonstrated ability to operate under accounting procedures and fiscal control devices as required by state and federal agencies:**
- i) The agency's accounting procedures align with current federal regulations outlined in 2 [CFR part 200](#).
  - ii) The agency budget items for the program are in accordance with the allowable contract allocations and guidelines for use of federal BCP funds.
  - iii) The agency participates in an annual audit by a certified public accountant.
  - iv) The agency maintains adequate liability insurance as evidenced by current policies covering:
    - a) Personal injury insurance
    - b) Professional liability insurance
    - c) Directors and Officers liability insurance
- 3) Proper maintenance of client information and documentation necessary for the effective delivery of service and client confidentiality:**
- i) To ensure secure and confidential treatment of client information, each agency agrees to:
    - a) Use a participant ID created in HMIS to ensure names and personal identifiers are not used when reporting or providing statistical data.
    - b) Present data used for reporting in aggregate so that individually identifying information is not disclosed.
    - c) Keep paper documents in locked file cabinets that are only accessible to specified program staff.
    - d) Have staff and volunteers sign confidentiality agreements concerning the release of participant information.
    - e) Provide staff and volunteers with training on confidentiality.
    - f) Require consent (youth and parent/guardian) in order to release participant information to other service providers.
    - g) Only allow disclosure of records without written consent in response to a court order, a medical emergency, a report of child abuse and/or neglect, a report that the youth intends to harm themselves or others, and the disposition of criminal charges against the youth.
    - h) Keep electronic records password protected, encrypted, and only accessible by select staff.
    - i) Shred all confidential records and identifying information seven (7) years after the close of services (unless required by other funding sources, such as Medicaid, to maintain files for longer).
  - ii) Each agency must have a secure process that allows youth to review their records, correct a file or file a statement of disagreement, and be apprised of all individuals and entities that have reviewed their records.

**4) All sites work towards cultural competency:**

- i) Agencies adhere to the [Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services](#) (CLAS) standards to provide effective, equitable, understandable and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices.
- ii) Case managers ensure that all youth enrolling in BCP understand that the program operates in a safe, inclusive, and non-stigmatizing manner and that services are sensitive to culture, gender & identity, and language needs.

**5) All sites will prohibit harassment:**

- i) All staff is required to create harassment and bully-free environments and prohibit harassment based on race, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and expression, religion, national origin, and socio-economic status.
- ii) Each site's parent agency provides additional annual training to prevent harassment.
- iii) Sites have detailed procedures for handling reports of harassment or bullying behaviors that include:
  - a) Written documentation of harassment reports submitted to the agency's Executive Director
  - b) Written action plans to address the behavior of the harassers
- iv) At every site, the Executive Director, case managers, youth and /or youth's family are included in the process for addressing harassment.
- v) All program participants are notified of these policies at intake and provided with information on how to report any harassment witnessed or experienced on site.

**6) All sites have a plan for serving youth who have run away from foster care or correctional institutions:**

- i) Plans address youth under the age of 18 who have run away from foster care placement or correctional institutions, in accordance with federal, state, or local laws or regulations that apply to these situations.
- ii) Sites take steps to ensure that youth who are or should be under the legal jurisdiction of the juvenile justice or child welfare systems obtain and receive services from those systems until such time as they are released from the jurisdictions of those systems.

**C. OUTREACH EFFORTS**

**STANDARD:** *BCP sites conduct public outreach and community awareness building activities to ensure that youth are connected to appropriate services.*

**MEASURES:**

**1) All sites inform the community about the Basic Center Program through a variety of outreach strategies.**

- i) Sites inform the community about the program by:
  - a) Utilizing social media and public services announcements.

- b) Collaborating with other organizations and providers serving the same or similar client populations.
- c) Developing and distributing materials providing information about services and benefits, such as brochures, resources cards, posters, or flyers.
- d) Participating in formal and informal presentations to community groups.
- e) Maintaining a website presence.

**2) All sites have a service coordination plan to ensure appropriate system of care services are accessible to youth in the program.**

- i) Sites coordinate with CoCs to ensure youth have access to all available resources.
- ii) Sites have suitable referral plans/relationships with other system of care providers so that coordination, based on an assessment of youth needs, can occur.

**D. BASIC CENTER PROGRAM SERVICE DELIVERY**

**STANDARD:** *BCP sites shall provide all services required by the RHY Act, the RHY Final Rule, and the Funding Opportunity Announcement under which they receive funding.*

**MEASURES:**

**3) Each site operates a 24-hour/7-day a week crisis line to ensure youth have immediate access to help:**

- i) Sites will maintain phone access to crisis services 24-hours a day, seven days a week through on-call schedules, utilization of answering services, or MOUs with other community partners as approved by VCRHYP.
- ii) Case managers and those assigned to crisis coverage respond to crisis calls immediately and non-crisis contacts within 24 hours.
- iii) When youth need immediate shelter, staff arrange transportation to a shelter or host home.
- iv) In non-crisis situations, case managers schedule initial meetings at times and locations convenient for the youth.

**4) Access to safe, appropriate emergency shelter that meets length-of-stay and age limitations outlined above.**

- i) All sites are licensed with the status of Commissioner Designated Shelter Program, placing them in compliance with all state and local licensing requirements to operate at least one of the following housing models:
  - a) *Congregate Care Shelter*  
 DEFINITION: Shelter setting with combined living quarters and restroom facilities, centralized dining services, shared living spaces, and access to social and recreational activities, and which is not a family home.
    - Staff are on-site at all times to provide supervision.
    - Appropriate youth-to-staff ratio is maintained.

- Capacity within a single structure allows for a minimum of 4 youth and a maximum of 20 youth at any given time.
  - Youth may be sheltered for a maximum of 21 consecutive days.
- b) *Host Homes*
- DEFINITION: A family or single adult home, other than that of a parent or permanent legal guardian, that provides shelter to a homeless or runaway youth.
- Host home providers are screened and trained as dictated by VCRHYP policies and procedures.
  - When recruiting/selecting host homes, BCP sites:
    - Conduct in-depth interviews with candidates.
    - Check personal references.
    - Run background checks on all adult occupants that include State or Tribal criminal history records (including fingerprint checks), FBI criminal history records (including fingerprint checks), a child abuse and neglect state registry check, and a sex offender registry check.
    - Inspect homes to ensure living space is adequate, clean, and safe.
    - Provide host home providers with training on substance abuse, trauma-informed support, adolescent development, and setting and maintaining personal boundaries.
  - BCP coordinators provide regular supervision to youth and host home providers and are available 24-hours/7-days a week through each agency's on-call system.
  - Youth may be sheltered for a maximum of 21 consecutive days.
- ii) All sites have policies dictating procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency or disaster that include the following:
- a) A list and location of all emergency equipment located at the sites.
  - b) Evacuation plans for each site, which designates the site of an alternative location.
  - c) Strategies for addressing security, food, medical supplies, and notification of a youth's legal guardian.
  - d) Instructions regarding the process of informing site leadership, the VCHRYP admin team, and FYSB when an evacuation or disaster occurs.
  - e) Instructions for completing an incident report.
  - f) For sites that use host homes additional instructions are included that:
    - Detail emergency/first aid equipment that must be available at each area housing youth.
    - Detail communication plans to contact the BCP case manager in the event of an emergency.
    - Detail site-specific evacuation plans.
  - g) Youth and host home providers review emergency plans and the location of emergency equipment upon assuming residence.
  - h) BCP case managers check equipment to ensure proper working order on a regular basis.
- iii) To ensure safe and appropriate exits, all sites establish an Exit Plan with youth within three days of their entry into shelter, which includes:



- a) Options for where the youth will live at exit from shelter.
- b) Information about the youth's support network.
- c) The best way for program staff to reach youth after they have exited.
- d) How the program will support youth through aftercare contacts and follow-up services.

**5) All sites have policies requiring that legal guardians are notified when a youth enters shelter.**

- i) Sites notify a youth's legal guardian immediately upon the youth's entry into shelter.
  - a) If immediate notification is not possible, sites ensure notification is made within 24 hours of a youth's entry.
- ii) If the legal guardian cannot be reached or there are concerns about notifying them, sites will:
  - a) Maintain documentation of all attempts to contact the legal guardian, if appropriate.
  - b) Inform the Department for Children and Families and VCRHYP of the situation.
  - c) Work with the youth to identify an alternative adult to notify.
  - d) Provide documentation to VCRHYP about why the legal guardian cannot or should not be notified, which VCRHYP will pass on to the appropriate FYSB representative.

**6) All sites provide trauma-informed counseling and case management including: intake, assessment, case planning, harm reduction activities, community service linkages, skill building, and recreation and leisure activities, harm reduction.**

- i) Case managers and intake counselors conduct an initial needs assessment using an evidence-based or evidence-informed assessment tool and collect HMIS intake data.
- ii) Case managers meet individually with youth at least once weekly.
- iii) Case managers help youth connect with other community resources, including accompanying youth on initial visits to ensure relationships are established with other caring adults in the community.
  - a) If not accompanying youth, case managers follow up with youth to ensure connection was made and to troubleshoot if it wasn't.
- iv) Case managers advocate for youth and teach youth to self-advocate for their own rights and needs with schools, health care providers, and other resources.

**7) All sites provide home-based prevention services to youth and their families for the purpose of preventing youth from running away or otherwise becoming separated from their families.**

- i) Case managers will provide services in the residences of families, to the extent practicable, including intensive individual and family counseling and training relating to life skills and parenting.
- ii) Program ensures caseloads remain sufficiently low to allow for intensive (5 to 20 hours per week) involvement with each family receiving home-based services.

**8) Case managers will ensure that each BCP participant has a written service or treatment plan/ plan of care.**

- i) Service plans are created within 30 working days of intake and updated at least every 6 months.
- ii) Youth and their parents/guardians sign an agreement acknowledging they are voluntarily participating in services and agreeing to program requirements.
- iii) Plans address stable housing, education or employment, permanent connections, and social and emotional wellbeing needs.
  - a) All plans include a family reunification or stabilization goal and strategies for establishing permanency.
- iv) Plans should be created with youth input and reflect youth voice in goals.
- v) Goals should be written with measurable indicators of progress which will be used to track youth's progress towards goals.
- vi) Plans should be referred to regularly to celebrate incremental successes and, if needed, revise goals or strategies.

**9) All BCP sites conduct continual, intense, individualized outreach to runaway, homeless, or street youth under the age of 18 designed to connect them to appropriate services.**

- i) BCP sites develop youth outreach plans that detail where staff locate youth, including the general areas and locations where youth congregate and a plan for face-to-face contact.
- ii) When necessary and appropriate to facilitate the delivery of BCP services, outreach staff provide food, drink, referrals to shelter, clothing, personal safety information (such as national or local hotlines), transportation, and hygiene to prevent malnutrition and ill-health while building trust with youth they encounter.
- iii) Outreach staff build rapport with youth to identify those who are at-risk of sexual exploitation and human trafficking.

**10) BCP sites engage youth in aftercare services.**

- i) Staff will provide additional services to youth, for up to three months after they leave shelter, that offer continuous and supportive follow-up, including:
  - a) Encouraging youth (and families, as appropriate) to follow up on referrals to other services
  - b) Making additional referrals, if needed
  - c) Assessing if stable housing is still in place
  - d) Gathering data and feedback about each youth's progress
  - e) Reassuring youth that additional supports are available from the program for as long as they are eligible.
- ii) Staff will contact providers, if consent is provided by the youth and their legal guardian, in order to ensure that needed services have been provided to youth and/or their families.

## **E. PARTICIPATION IN VCRHYP'S CENTRALIZED DATA COLLECTION AND STATEWIDE HOMELESSNESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (HMIS)**

**STANDARD:** *BCP sites shall participate in VCRHYP's data collection mechanisms, including providing required client level data to VCRHYP for entry into HMIS.*

### **MEASURES:**

- 1) Each site will submit client level HMIS data to VCRHYP for entry into HMIS within 30 days of intake, when a youth switches programs, at exit, and while providing aftercare services.**
  - i) BCP sites will use VCRHYP's most current HMIS reporting forms for client intake data, exit data, and aftercare contact data.
  
- 2) Each site will submit updated client level HMIS data to VCRHYP once every quarter for all youth served.**
  - i) Quarterly Update forms will be submitted by the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month following the previous quarter.
  
- 3) When reporting requires that HMIS data be up-to-date, sites will comply with data submission dates established by VCRHYP.**

## **E. ACCOUNTABILITY:**

**STANDARD:** *BCP sites shall participate in VCRHYP's monitoring activities, including site visits, file reviews and submission of any required documentation.*

### **MEASURES:**

- 1) Each BCP funded agency will participate in VCRHYP site visits at least once per grant cycle, per VCRHYP's site monitoring protocol.**
  - i) Site visits by the VCRHYP admin team will be used to:
    - a) Assess compliance with BCP standards.
    - b) Review required documentation.
    - c) Monitor practice.
    - d) Identify training/technical assistance needs.
    - e) Review Positive Youth Development and trauma-informed approaches.
    - f) Evaluate how well the needs of diverse youth are being met.
  
- 2) Each BCP funded agency will participate in an annual performance measure and program outcome review with VCRHYP, per VCRHYP's site monitoring protocol.**
  - i) Performance measure and program outcome reviews will be used to:
    - a) Identify training/technical assistance needs.

- b) Determine gaps in successful service delivery and program implementation.
- c) Highlight successful program components.
- d) Engage BCP sites in a continuous quality improvement plan.

**3) BCP sites are evaluated annually by the Vermont Department for Children and Families' Residential Licensing Unit to ensure shelter meets state codes and requirements for safe, appropriate housing for youth.**

- i) BCP sites will provide VCRHYP with a copy of their current Commissioner Designated Shelter license upon receipt from DCF.
- ii) BCP sites will inform VCRHYP of perceived or expected barriers to having their license renewed PRIOR to the expiration of their current license.
  - a) Sites will accept any technical assistance offered by VCRHYP in an effort to avoid lapse of license.